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John W. Childs,
with the report of
Robert A. ...

SPEECH OF GEN. DIX,

*At the opening of the proceedings of the National Union
Convention at Philadelphia, August 14, 1866.*

Gentlemen of the Convention, and Fellow-citizens of the whole Union, (applause :) I return you my sincere thanks for the honor you have done me in choosing me to preside temporarily over your deliberations. I regard it as a distinction of no ordinary character, not only on account of the high personal and political standing of the gentlemen who compose this Convention, but because it is a convention of the people of all the States of this Union (cheers), and because we cannot doubt that, if its proceedings are conducted with harmony and good judgment, it will lead to the most important results. It may be truly said that no body of men has met on this continent under circumstances so momentous and so delicate since the year 1787—the year when our ancestors assembled in this city to frame a better government for the States which were parties to the old Confederation—a government which has been confirmed and made more enduring, as we trust, by the fearful trials and perils which it has encountered and overcome. The Constitution which they came here to plan and to construct we are here to vindicate and to restore. [Cheers.] We are here to assert the supremacy of representative government over all who are within the confines of the Union; a government which cannot, without a violation of its fundamental principles, be extended over any but those who are represented in it (loud applause), over those who, by virtue of that representation, are entitled to a voice in the administration of the public affairs. [Renewed applause.] It was such a govern-

ment our fathers framed and put in operation. It is the government which we are bound by every consideration of fidelity, justice and good faith to defend and to maintain. [Cheers].

Gentlemen, we are not living under such a government. [Applause and cries of "That is true."] Thirty-six States have for months been governed by twenty-five—eleven States have been wholly without representation in the legislative body of the nation; the numerical proportion of the represented States to the unrepresented has just been changed by the admission of the delegation from Tennessee—a unit taken from the smaller and added to the larger number. Ten States are still denied the representation in Congress to which they are entitled under the Constitution. It is this wrong which we have come here to protest against and as far as in us lies, to redress. (Great applause.)

When the President of the United States declared that armed resistance to the authority of the Union was over, all the States had a right to be represented in the National Legislature. [Loud cheering.] They had the right under the Constitution. They had the right under resolutions passed by both Houses of Congress in 1861. Those resolutions were not concurrent, but they were substantially identical. Moreover, the States were entitled to be so represented on other grounds of fairness and good faith. The President, not in pursuance of any constitutional power, had called on the confederated States to accept certain conditions for their admission to the exercise of their legitimate functions as members of the Union,—the ratification of the amendment to the Constitution, abolishing slavery, and the repudiation of the debts contracted to overthrow the Government. These conditions were met and accepted. The exaction of new conditions is unjust, a violation of the faith of the government, subversive of the principles of our political system, and dangerous to the public prosperity and peace. [Applause.]

Each House of Congress may, as the judge of the qualifications of its own members, reject individuals for just cause; but the two bodies, acting conjointly, cannot exclude entire

delegations without an unwarrantable assumption of power. [Applause.] Congress has not only done this; it has gone farther. It has incorporated new conditions into amendments to the Constitution, and submitted them for the ratification of the States. There is no probability that these amendments will be ratified by three-fourths of the States. To insist on the conditions they contain is to prolong indefinitely the exclusion of more than one-fourth of the States from representation in Congress. [Applause.] Is this the Government our fathers fought to establish? [Cries of "No! No!"] Is this the Union we have been fighting to preserve? ["No! No!"]

The President has done all in his power to correct this wrong (applause), and to restore the legislative body to its full proportions, by giving to all the members of the Union their proper share in the public councils. [Cheers.] Legislation without representation is an anomaly under our political system. Under any other form of government it would be but another name for usurpation and misrule. And the President is entitled to the thanks of the country for his firmness in opposing a policy so illiberal, so demoralizing, and so directly at war with every principle of our political organization.

I have referred to the condition of the legislative body under the aspects of right on the one hand and duty on the other,—the right of the States to be represented and the duty of Congress to receive their representatives. On the score of policy, nothing can be more unwise than to prolong the present anomalous relation of the States to each other. It is calculated to embitter on both sides animosities and resentments, which it is our duty, by all just measures, to soothe and heal. It disturbs the action of the government; it deranges the application of capital and labor; it impedes the development of our resources; it impairs our credit and our good name at home and abroad; and it retards the march of the country to prosperity and power.

Gentlemen, I trust that in our deliberations here we shall confine ourselves to one main purpose—that of redressing the wrong to which I have referred. There is much in the



administration of the government which needs amendment—some things to be done and others to be undone. There are commercial and financial reforms which are indispensable to the public welfare. But we shall not have the power to carry them out until we change the political complexion of Congress. [Enthusiastic and long continued applause.] This should be our first, our immediate aim. It is in the Congressional districts that the vital contest is to take place. The control of one branch of Congress will enable us to prevent partial, unjust, and pernicious legislation. The control of both houses, with the power to introduce and carry out salutary reforms, to “bring the government back,” in the language of Jefferson, “to the republican tack,” will come later. [Cheers.] But, with wise, harmonious and judicious action on our part, and on the part of those we represent, this need not be long delayed. [Applause.] I believe that public opinion is right, and that it is only necessary to present to the people clearly the issues between us and the ultraism which controls the action of Congress.

And, gentlemen, is not the object for which we are contending a consummation worthy of our highest and most devoted efforts—to bring back the republic, purified and strengthened by the fiery ordeal through which it has passed to its ancient prosperity and power (applause)—to present to the world an example worthy of imitation, not a mere Utopian vision of good government, but the grand old reality of the better times (applause) with which the memory of our fathers, the recollections of the past, and all our hopes of the future, are inseparably entwined (cheers)—one country, one flag, one Union of equal States. [Long-continued applause.]

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